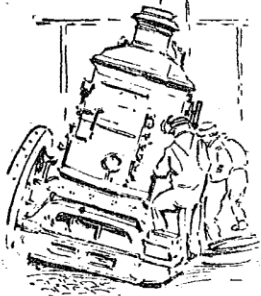


FAST DRIVING OF THE FIRE FIGHTERS.

Responding to Alarms, the Engine Horses Rush Madly Along Through Crowded Streets—Not So Many Accidents Since the Adoption of Rubber Tires—Collisions That Have Occurred and Drivers Who Have Been Injured—How a Fire Horse Lost His Hoof—Narrow Escape on the Warren Bridge.



A Modern Engine Answering an Alarm



I HAVE often wondered whether there ever existed a person who saw the fire apparatus of our cities responding to an alarm without a glow of enthusiasm. Recently I asked Capt. Quarters to tell me just how it felt to ride at breakneck speed through the streets, missing something at every turn, and expecting every moment to go sprawling into the gutter.

The old veteran half-closed his eyes, and quizzically examined me: "What's the game?" he asked, somewhat gruffly.

"No game at all!" I answered in all seriousness. "That's a good fair question, isn't it? I want to know, that's all."

"O, well, if that's all," he began soothingly. "To tell the truth, I don't know that I could tell you, for I've never thought of it; but, of course, there's always a chance of hitting something, and smashing up the men and horses. Makes it bad, too, for you've got to make reports on all such things.

"Talking about sensations when going to a fire, I doubt whether a man has a chance to notice much. He's really too busy getting into his duds. The drivers are the ones principally interested about that time; though after the other men get their coats and helmets on, they have a chance to look around; but on first alarms downtown, a man has all he can do to get a coat on; and dressing on the apparatus, I can assure you, isn't the easiest matter in the world. By constant practice it becomes second nature, and a man balances himself without a thought, but you've got to look out for yourself, or the first thing you know you'll be in the street waiting for the ambulance. That's happened to many a good man."

"Can't expect anything else, going the way you fellows do," I remarked.

"You never saw us going," scornfully replied the old veteran. "You're nicely tucked into bed when we're making time. Can't do much in the day time. Night's the time for fast running. The streets are clear and the drivers can let their horses out. You want to see them coming in from all directions on a third alarm downtown. Take a combination alarm, where they

skip the immediate ones. That's where you'd see something. Everybody fighting to get in first. There's always enough for all; but they never stop to think of that.

"It's the driving you're interested in, and there's where you see it. Some of the boys become wonderfully expert with the ribbons; and though almost every fireman can jump up and drive on a pinch, there's a vast difference between drivers. Company commanders who want to see their companies in on time, want good reliable men in the seat, and you can bet we figure on having someone up there that knows his business.

"There's all the difference in the world, too, between driving downtown, where the streets are narrow and tracked, and driving where the streets are good and wide. Downtown the bad paving and cobblestones raise the dickens with the horses' hoofs. Every time one of them kicks a shoe off—which is nearly every run-off goes part of the hoof with it, and they can't stand that game very long. When they get too bad, they are sent out of town where the roads are better. Dirt roads are much easier on the horses. To have one of those shoes come sailing by your head isn't the most pleasant sensation in the world.

"Then there's no comparison between the running of downtown working companies, and the running of those in the suburbs. Some of the downtown companies do as much running in a month as out-of-town companies do in a year.

"You'd like to drive? Well, I'd like to see you up there—some zero night, without a chance to get a coat or a mitten on—and five horses out to do you if they can. It's no joke, I assure you."

"Accidents? O, sure, once in a while, of course. Those things are bound to happen, for we're between the devil and the deep sea. We've got to make time, and we've got to get there safe if we can. The apparatus that's scattered all over the street isn't much good for a fire that's burning up somebody's home a mile away. If you're making time

and you hit anything, or what's much the same thing, somebody hits you, why, you get the blame from everybody in the vicinity.

"Of course you know that every piece of apparatus has a certain route to take to every box it responds to, and as far as is consistent with speed, that route is different from that taken by any other. The idea is to have the fire located as quickly as possible, for by coming from different directions one of the pieces of apparatus is sure to strike the fire before it reaches the box.

The various companies give one another close rubs. The chiefs know just when each company is due, and the captain who fails to report his company right on time is apt to find himself in hot water.

"The horses got badly cut up sometimes. I remember engine 10's team had a smashup and put the off horse through a plate glass window. He was terribly cut about the right side of his chest and required many stitches. He recovered, however and returned to duty. Again he figured in an accident, and was injured in precisely the same manner on the opposite side. He recovered, and when he returned to duty life scars formed two stars placed with almost mathematical precision on opposite sides of his breast.

"A year or two ago one of our horses got his foot in a railroad crossing frog on Atlantic av. Going at that rate, there was no chance for him, the hoof was torn completely off. He had to be shot.

"Last summer I saw a horse that had stumbled on the steep incline near the training ground in Charlestown. He was doubled up and compactly wedged beneath the heavy truck of ladder 21. Fortunately, death in that case was instantaneous.

"A few winters ago I saw the crew of ladder 24 roll into a fire in the West End with everyone drenched—trying to stanch the blood from a gaping wound in the breast of one of their horses, caused by his being impaled on the shaft of a wagon with which they had collided. The truck reached the fire all right, though the horse was dying.

"Once in a while you see horses and men scattered all over the street, and sometimes without serious injury to either. Such a case was that when ladder 1 piled into a car that refused to stop at the intersection of Blackstone and Hanover sts.

"Those who were in the company when engine 6 struck a car on Merrimac st say that not a ribbon of harness was left on the horses. Another day the wagon team bolted. The pole struck an elevated pillar and flew into splinters. The collars sprang open and released the uninjured horses. The wagon went into the pillar and stopped just as the dashboard was turned up over the driver's knees. (Patsey Wall was driving.)

"Collisions between two pieces of apparatus are invariably disastrous. Engine 4 and engine 6 have had a couple of notable ones—one at the corner of Chambers and Cambridge sts, when the apparatus was considerably damaged, and another at the junction of Blackstone and Hanover sts. It was engine 6 and the hose wagon of engine 4 that collided on this occasion. They came together with terrific force. One of the survivors afterward told me that when he recovered he found himself gazing up into the brightly blazing fire on the grates of engine 6. The embers were dropping on his face and breast. He shouted, and strove to turn over, but the next instant the heavy iron-tired wheels of the engine, backing to clear the wreck, crushed his leg to a shapeless pulp. Though dreadfully mangled, he afterward recovered sufficiently to enjoy a well-earned pension.

"Before the days of rubber tires upsets were frequent. Engine 5 of East Boston several times turned turtle at the foot of Marion st where it descends to Meridian. In slippery weather it is almost impossible to make the turn.

"The iron tires have a mean way of hugging the car tracks and sliding the rear end, with a result that though the front end might go clear of an object, the rear end, not being where it ought to be, strikes something which the driver thought was safe. Broken axles were extremely frequent before the rubber tire took the worst of the shocks of the ironwork. Even now when the streets are wet the wheels stick to the greasy tracks and slide the apparatus in the most unexpected way. Only a few months ago engine

6 met with a curious accident from this cause when going down Merrimac st. A huge angle-iron pillar was being backed into an iron-working shop. It projected across the street. The driver of the engine, Arthur Johnson, did his best to swing out clear, but the wheels clung to the tracks and the dome of the engine struck the pillar. Fortunately, no one was hurt; the pillar missing the driver's head by about an inch. The dome was pushed back and secured as quickly as possible, and the engine went on and worked at a three-alarm fire in the North End.

"Old members of engine 6 often tell of the time when the hose wagon driver found it impossible to make the sharp turn on one of the hills in Charlestown. The wagon tipped over, pitching the driver clear out over the horses' heads. When he recovered sufficiently to take notice, he was more than surprised to see the greater part of the company clinging to a large sign projecting above a store, for all the world, as he described it, like herrings hung up to dry.

One day engine 4, brand new, with a team of green horses, started to turn round on Myrtle st, at the top of one of the steep inclines leading from Cambridge st. The horses bolted down the hill. The men did their best to block the wheels, but in vain. The assistant engineer, Joseph W. Ferreira, jumped on to blow the whistle and thus warn those below. Driver Jack Kelly stuck to his seat, and down from Beacon hill rushed the five and a half ton engine. Being late at night the streets were clear and the engine was safely stopped, but not until it had gone across Cambridge st and far beyond. A few nights after this affair a team attached to an ice wagon did the same thing and the driver was instantly killed.

"I remember going to a third or fourth alarm in East Boston one night. The fire was on the water front. The street

into which we turned had been widened some time before, but for some inexplicable reason the curbstone had not been removed. We took the corner on the fly and struck that six or seven-inch rise fair in front with a thump that lifted us all into the air. The shock was tremendous. I found myself on my back in the bottom of the tender. I was sure that the engine had turned turtle. I scrambled to my feet and was delighted to find her still right side up and going as good as ever, the driver just scrambling back into the seat from which he had been tossed over the dasher onto the pole. Not so fortunate was driver Ackerly of East Boston, who was recently tossed from his seat in like manner and instantly killed.

"A few years ago engine 26, closely followed by the hose wagon, plunged into an unguarded and unreported opening on Washington st. The damage was severe. Not very long after that an engine team of horses bolted and plunged over the side of an incline somewhere on the outskirts of the city, but though they had a clear fall of more than 20 feet, I think they got out of it without serious damage.

"The accident is still fresh in mind of engine 27, fairly flying down Bunker Hill st and crashing into a car coming at full speed in the opposite direction. The impact was terrific. Two of the horses were killed and the driver, Walter W. Towle, plunged straight through the windows of the car, going in on one side and coming out on the other. He landed in the street.

"The chief's buggies are pretty light affairs and frequently snap axles. An accident of this sort was primarily responsible for the death of the late Chief of Department Cheswell. He reported for duty too soon after the accident and shortly after was carried away in a dying condition from an early morning blaze down town.

Deputy Chief McDonough and his driver, "Darby" West, met with an accident while going down Hanover st one night. Former chief's driver, now horseman West of engine 10, has had

some thrilling experiences. He and the late Acting District Chief Peter Callahan were thrown from the buggy on Prison Point bridge. When "Darby" and the acting chief recovered sufficiently to sit up and look after the cloud of dust representing the disappearing buggy the chief voiced their joint sentiments, while "Darby" tried to pick the splinters out of his face. As one of his wrists was broken he was sadly handicapped. Acting Chief Callahan was singularly unfortunate. He was nearly drowned in a cellar shortly after this accident, and finally he lost his life from injury received while working at a fire.

"Colliding with a street sweeping machine, the horses of which became unmanageable on the approach of the apparatus, District Chief Fox and his driver, Thomas Callahan, son of the late acting district chief, were thrown into the street. The horse was captured, but the contents of the buggy

were abstracted during the excitement. As these articles consisted of various expensive fittings used in fire fighting, the chief was in a quandary as to their whereabouts. He said nothing about his loss, but did a good deal of thinking, and set very quietly about the task of recovering them, by watching very closely the places most likely to have them. In a short time he secured from various sources every one of the missing articles.

"We had a narrow escape going over the Warren bridge to a 'second' one night. The mud was flying, and one great cake caught me fairly in the eye. It was impossible to remove it, so the only thing I could do was to keep my hand over it, and look out with the other. I always like to see where I'm going. The first thing I saw when I looked up was the lights of a steamer going through the draw. It's nip and tuck between us and engine 8 to City square, and the truck was right on our

heels. The driver had his eyes fixed on the upper bridge over which 8 was tearing in grand style. With all the power of our lungs we shouted to the driver to pull up. Back on the reins he surged. There isn't one in a million that could have done it; but he did, and stopped the horses within a foot of the gates. The driver had seen the lights, but believed them to denote that one of the two bridges was closed for repairs.

"Accidents happen in peculiar ways. One night engine 10 had to go in between a car and the curbstone. The wagon following closely behind had to do the same thing. Everything looked clear and the wagon was making fast time, but unfortunately a box projecting from a telegraph post caught the driver's seat, demolishing the wagon, and hurling in all directions the men who were on top.

"One day, while going down Hanover st in response to box 10, I was turned upside down. The driver was wedged beneath the upturned seat, being deluged and frightfully burned by the vitriol flowing from the broken charges the chemical tanks. He was extricated with difficulty, and attended with all dispatch, but he had been fearfully burned before anything could be done for him. I particularly remember seeing one of his thick, heavy soled shoes which had been doubled up like a piece of cardboard. He recovered and is driving that machine today."